

Schedule writer tracks large staff

Anyone who has maintained a manual scheduling system for more than a handful of employees knows how complicated that process can get.

It's natural, then, to let a computer fret about all the details of fitting personnel to job assignments. One program that specializes in employee scheduling is Who Works When.

Who Works When has every conceivable feature you can think of and can schedule up to 200 employees at a time. It absorbs the complexities of multiple shifts and changing staff availabilities and generates a blizzard of reports showing the status of schedules.

Because the program thrives on all the details only a computer could love, you'll have to enter a lot of data before you see results. But once you've set it up, here are some of the scheduling features you'll have on tap:

- You can define up to 26 different shift patterns that can take place at each of 20 departments. Departments can be subdivided into tasks and stations. Up to 200



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employees can be scheduled per file with an unlimited number of files. Each employee can be coded for two different jobs.

- Assignments can reflect peak workloads, flex time and rotation scheduling. An employee-schedule order gives preference to employees based on seniority or for other reasons. Work patterns reflecting so many days on and so many days off are easily programmed. Employees can be grouped by teams. Details about each worker, including vacations, availability for overtime, assignment preferences and total hours willing to work per week, are all automatically calculated into the master schedule.

- Many printouts are available. Staff Schedule shows each employee, job, code, station and shift. In-

dividual Employee Schedule is a printed schedule for each employee. Employees Not Scheduled Report is handy for showing oversights or as a pool for on-demand call ups. Other reports show cumulative data about a facility, departments or employees.

Recognizing the need to constantly write data into the program, Who Works When includes a number of template work sheets in the manual. These forms, which mimic the on-screen data fields, are meant for photocopying and distribution to department heads and employees. Once the data from the forms is entered into the program, a manager can concentrate on making scheduling decisions. By juggling employee assignments, a manager can play out "what-if" scenarios.

On the downside, Newport Systems has the most expensive support policy of any program I've ever reviewed. To get any questions answered — even installation problems — you must first subscribe to a support plan that has two options: either you pay \$75 an

hour or \$160 for 90 days of support. And there's no 800 number.

Also on the downside, department schedules cannot be projected for longer than six weeks, and no password security is built in — a feature that seems rather important for any program relating to personnel matters.

- The Bottom Line: When I first started using Who Works When I thought it was a complex program to use. But as I worked through the lessons and saw the printed reports, I realized that this program made a complex task easier.

The reports are well thought out and make useful tools. For a company with a large staff, this program is a good choice, despite the expensive support policy.

Who Works When costs \$479 and is published by Newport Systems, P.O. Box 3705, Bellevue, Wash. 98009; (206) 451-0537.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity.